



February 22, 2022

Good afternoon, Senators Osten, Kushner & Cicarella, Representatives Walker, Abercrombie & Betts, and members of the Committee. The Network Against Domestic Abuse provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Enfield, Stafford, Somers, East Windsor, Windsor Locks and Suffield. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

One-time CSFRF Allocation to Address Victims' Safety Risks & Needs - \$2,900,000

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to allocate \$2,900,000 in FY23 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSFRF) to the Department of Social Services (DSS) to address victims' safety risks and needs, which have been intensified by the pandemic, and urge your support. This funding will assist CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (CCADV) 18 member organizations, including The Network Against Domestic Abuse, with providing critical assistance to victims including sheltering/hoteling, food, transportation costs, basic needs, childcare assistance, housing, moving, utilities, and furniture assistance.

Throughout the pandemic, we have seen an increase in the complexity of issues facing survivors and financial support for direct client emergency needs, like those listed above, is a common request from survivors struggling to achieve financial independence from their abusers during these challenging times. This allocation of one-time pandemic relief funding will allow our service system to provide much needed emergency assistance to survivors struggling to achieve financial independence.

In addition to the emergency financial needs of survivors, this funding will assist with the ongoing emergency housing needs of survivors fleeing their abusive homes. For years Connecticut's domestic violence shelters have functioned well-above capacity with an average utilization rate of 122% between fiscal years 2016 and 2020, meaning shelters were overflowing year-round. But with the pandemic, shelter utilization has seen a sharp increase and the cost has skyrocketed due to the need to rely more heavily on the use of hoteling to properly social distance existing shelter space.

Since the start of the pandemic, The Network Against Domestic Abuse has incurred \$138,942 of expenses related to hoteling, remote advocacy, PPE and an increased demand for basic human needs for the individuals we serve.

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To date, we have received various pandemic relief funds through both DSS and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, as well as having the opportunity to leverage private philanthropic dollars. However, we anticipate that hoteling will continue as a significant cost through FY23. Additional one-time CSFRF will be critical to addressing the ongoing emergency shelter and emergency financial needs of survivors.

Annual Funding to Support Domestic Violence Child & Family Advocates - \$1,440,000

In addition to supporting the Governor's proposal for use of CSFRF to assist survivors, we're calling on the General Assembly to allocate annual funding in the amount of \$1,440,000 to fund 18 domestic violence child & family advocates across the state at CCADV's member organizations, including one here at The Network Against Domestic Abuse. Connecticut currently does not provide any state funding to support this critical role within the domestic violence service system.

As the pandemic has stretched on longer than any of us originally anticipated, the secondary effects of this global crisis continue to play out in communities and homes across Connecticut. Much attention has rightfully been paid to the impact of the pandemic on the mental health and social-emotional development of children. This concern is only heightened for those children who, on top of dealing with pandemic isolation, have been experiencing domestic violence in their homes.

Sadly, we have noticed that more children have been witness to domestic abuse. This is due to both remote learning in the home and increased stress in families over the last two years. Our Child Advocate, here at The Network, works with children and families that seek a safe place to live while fleeing domestic abuse. In addition to therapeutic projects and play, the Child Advocate works with the parent to manage all aspects of the child's transition into both the shelter and into new homes. This could include helping the child enroll in a new school or help manage necessary appointments related to health and wellness.

Currently, federal pass-through funds in the amount of \$11,500 support only about a quarter of the cost of a full-time advocate. For The Network Against Domestic Abuse, that means that we have to supplement the \$11,500 we receive through private fundraising or utilizing the advocate in a split role, to support the full cost of the position. In the end, even with our efforts to cobble together the position of child & family advocate, we know that we aren't able to truly dedicate the time we need to fully meet the needs of all children experiencing domestic violence in the north central Connecticut region we serve.

As we begin to come out of the pandemic, we are concerned that there will be a large influx of children presenting with significant need to various systems, including the domestic violence service system. We must be prepared to meet the needs of these most vulnerable victims. Adequate state funding is needed to properly support a full-time advocate at each of the state's 18 domestic violence

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organizations, including The Network Against Domestic Abuse. For a small amount of annual funding (less than 0.01% of the overall state budget), we can make a big impact on kids.

Thank you for your consideration.

Warm Regards,

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